

## Down to Earth: Returned astronaut relishes little things (Update)

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Tim Peake is relishing daily events since returning from six months in space

Using a normal toilet and appreciating weather—"any weather whatsoever"—are some of the small pleasures astronaut Tim Peake has enjoyed most since returning from the International Space Station (ISS), he said Tuesday.

The Briton has had to leave behind unparalleled views and the sensation of floating weightlessly in space.

And he faces a long, hard road of physical readjustment to gravity's pull, rebuilding lost muscle.

But there are perks to being back home, Peake said in webcast comments at the European Astronaut Centre in Cologne, Germany, on his third day back from the international orbiter.

"Using the loo, gravity is your friend. That's one of the things we do look forward to", he laughed.

Peake spent six months on the ISS, where relieving oneself involves the use of suction hoses to separate waste from the body.

Other things he had longed for, the 44-year-old space traveller said, were Earthly smells, fresh air, and rain.

"The rain, it's something that you don't feel up there... any weather down here whatsoever feels unique and it feels very special."

Peake, the first British astronaut on the ISS, returned Saturday with Russia's Yuri Malenchenko and NASA's Tim Kopra.

## **'Fantastic ride'**

Life in space took some getting used to, he recalled.



Tim Peake is enjoying using a normal toilet after landing back on Earth

"It's the first thing you do onboard the space station, you make it normal," said Peake.

"Because if you realised where you were and what you were doing with this huge wow factor, you simply couldn't function on a day-to-day basis."

Towards the end of his tenure, the dreams started becoming a bit "weird".

"You're on Earth but you're floating around in buildings and you're clearly in zero gravity... it gets a bit messed up," the astronaut recounted.

Favourite moments included witnessing the Milky Way from an unbeatable vantage point, photographing Egypt's pyramids, and observing the spectacle of an Earthly thunderstorm from an altitude of some 400 kilometres (250 miles).

Saturday's three-hour descent in a Russian Soyuz capsule was another highlight.

"You have two minds really, one is as a professional... but at the same time you can't help the sort of boy inside you that is enjoying this fantastic ride back from space," said Peake.

Everything went as planned, but he had one moment of worry.

The astronauts had been forewarned to expect a "big jolt" as the main parachute opens to slow the capsule down, but Peake felt none.

"The clock was running, and I was very aware of exactly what should happen at exactly what time, and the time had gone beyond the point at which the main 'chute had opened," he recalled.



The International Space Station crew members Tim Peake, Yuri Malenchenko and Timothy Kopra receive flowers at Karaganda, Kazakhstan, on June 18, 2016

"So for a second, I was concerned.

"I looked across to Yuri and he just sat there so relaxed and cool as he always is. I thought, well if we didn't have a main parachute opening, he wouldn't be looking as cool as that."

## **Back 'in a heartbeat'**

In spite of all the Earthly comforts he had missed, the astronaut said he'd go back "in a heartbeat".

For now, though, "I'd like to put the family first for a while".

He would not be drawn on Thursday's British vote on whether to leave the European Union, but stressed Britain should remain involved in Europe's space exploration projects.

"If we're not on board now, we'll miss out on the things that will be happening in the 20s and the things that will be happening in the 30s."

Peake had a message of encouragement for academic stragglers. He himself left school aged 19 with "below average" marks.

"I've just got back from a six-month mission to space, so my message to them is: 'Look, don't let anyone tell you you can't do anything.'"

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